

Food and Mental Health

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We all know, at some level, that what we eat will have some effect on the health of our body. A simple online search reveals a mountain of information about what we should and shouldn't eat, but most of this information is focused on food and physical health. Concern about our usual food patterns, our diet, and how it is connected to physical disease is the biggest priority for most people. Connections between diet and diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or cancer are important because preventing these diseases by changing our diet is possible. The burden of these diseases has been well studied and with cases of these diseases continuing to climb every year more and more effort is being exerted to stop the rise. Despite this focus on physical health, we have also come to know that what we eat has a direct effect on our mental health as well.

It is estimated that 13% of those that suffer from disease in the world, struggle with a mental illness of some kind. Because of this, many have studied the connection between diet and worsening symptoms connected to mental health. In fact, it is thought that for individuals with mental illness, what they eat in excess may have a greater effect than what is not regularly consumed. (Jacka, 2017) This is especially true for diets high in added sugars and processed foods. Mounting evidence is connecting high intake of these foods to worsening mental health conditions. (Owen & Corfe, 2017; Wattick et al., 2018) Sadly, many Americans are experiencing an increase in symptoms because our preferred diet is high in sugars and processed foods with a very low intake of fruits, vegetables, fish, and lean proteins. (Gill et al., n.d.) Eating a pattern like this has shown to be highly inflammatory, or

cause swelling in the body, which can decrease the ability of the brain to function properly.(Johnson et al., 2021) But don't let this get you down, there is hope! Research is also suggesting that a change in diet choices could help to reduce the length and severity of mental illness symptoms. (University, n.d.) This is great news! Often there isn't much we can do when we have an illness or a disease but making a change to your diet can reverse the symptoms and improve your overall health. Even a small change can have a big impact on mental health over time. Commit today to make a change and continue to build on that change step by step, you will love the change to your body and mind!

Need ideas on where to start? Give one of these a try!

- **Dump the sugary drinks and focus on water.**
Replacing one habit with another makes us more successful when we are trying to change and staying hydrated helps our body and mind function at its optimum.
- **Commit to eat more fruits and vegetables, add one fruit or vegetable to each meal or snack.**
These foods are packed with nutrients that build a healthy body and mind.
- **Add fish to your diet at least one time per week.**
Fish contains some key nutrients that most of us are severely lacking, baked, or grilled fish is an excellent addition to any diet.
- **Choose foods that are low in added sugars.**
Read food labels and choose foods with little to no added sugar. This change alone will make a major difference in how your body is functioning and regenerating.
- **Add high fiber foods.** Whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, fruits, and vegetables all contain fiber. Fiber keeps our bodies moving properly and eliminating the extra things that can weigh us down and disrupt our health.(Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2016)

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